CRIME
NO. 26
JAN.
10¢
CRIME
SUSPENSTORIES
JOLTING TALES OF
TENSION
IN THE
EC TRADITION!

THE FIXER

THE TWO MEN FROM HOMICIDE FOUND BILLY STILL STANDING BESIDE THE PHONE, THE "WHY?" IN HIS SOFT SAD BLUE EYES UNANSWERED. THE BOY... THE TOUSLED, TOW-HEADED BOY... TREMBLED LIKE A FRIGHTENED, PUZZLED PUPPY, REFLECTING UPON THE GRUESOME SCENE THAT WOULD REMAIN FOREVER ETCHED IN HIS YOUNG MIND. THE TWO MEN TOOK IN THE AWFUL TABLEAU... THE FATHER... THE MOTHER... THE SHABBY, BLOOD-SPATTERED RUG WHERE THEY LAY SPRAWLED... THE SCISSORS... THE BIG KNIFE, GLISTENING RED. DETECTIVE DAVE WARREN, THINKING OF HIS OWN TEN-YEAR-OLD, PUT A PROTECTIVE ARM AROUND BILLY AND DREW HIM CLOSE...

THE TWO TOUGH DICKS... THEY'D SEEN EVERYTHING IN THEIR TIME... EXCHANGED QUICK, BRIMMING-EYED GLANCES. WARREN NODDED TO A CHAIR AND PHIL DALY TURNED IT TOWARD THE WORN, SAGGING SOFA ...FACING AWAY FROM THE CARNAGE...

THEY SAT ON THE LUMPY SOFA OPPOSITE THE BOY. HE SIGHED A LITTLE AND PUCKERED HIS LIPS, TRYING TO REMEMBER...

TAKE IT EASY, BILLY. NO HURRY. JUST MAKE BELIEVE YOU *SAW* IT ALL ON *T.V.* AND YOU'RE TELLING A *FRIEND* ABOUT IT.
I BET IF WE'D *HAD* A T.V. SET, I'D'VE *HAD* FRIENDS. DADDY SAID WE'D *GET* ONE SOME DAY... ONLY I GUESS I'LL *NEVER* GET ONE *NOW*...

'ONCE BILLY FOUND A PLACE TO START HIS STORY, IT WAS AS THOUGH A FAUCET HAD SUDDENLY BEEN TURNED ON. HIS WORDS JUST FLOWED...

WHEN WE *MOVED* HERE, *DADDY* LOOKED OUT OF THE *WINDOW*...

'DADDY WAS *REAL MAD*...

LOOK AT THE WAY THEY KEEP *STARIN'* AT US FROM THEIR *HOUSES*, MAUD... LIKE WE WERE *MUTTS* TRYIN' TO WIN A *RIBBON* AT A *DOG SHOW*.

WE HAVE A *RIGHT* TO LIVE WHERE WE *WANT*, IRA!

WE'RE OUT OF THEIR *LEAGUE!* I *KNOW!* YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN THE *LOOK* I GOT FROM THE GUY *NEXT DOOR* WHEN HE SAW ME DRIVE UP ED'S *TRUCK* AND UNLOAD THE *JUNK FURNITURE* YOUR MOTHER GAVE US...

BILLY! YOU GO *OUT-SIDE* AND *PLAY!*

'MOM SENT ME OUT, BUT I HEARD WHAT THEY WERE SAYING 'CAUSE I STAYED BY THE DOOR...'

LISTEN, HONEY. WE'RE *LUCKY* TO HAVE A PLACE LIKE THIS! *ALL RIGHT*, SO PEOPLE ARE *CURIOUS!* *BILLY* WILL GET TO KNOW THEIR *KIDS*, AND THEN *WE'LL* MEET 'EM...

SURE! AND THEY'LL INVITE US TO JOIN THEIR *COUNTRY CLUBS!* DON'T MAKE ME *LAUGH!*

DON'T BE LIKE *THAT*, IRA! THINK HOW *GOOD* IT'LL BE FOR *BILLY*... GROWING UP IN A *NICE ENVIRON-MENT*...

SO HELP ME, MAUD, IF I HADN'T SIGNED A *LEASE*, I'D BORROW THE TRUCK AGAIN AND *MOVE OUT*. IT WAS A *BIG MISTAKE*. IT'LL TAKE EVERY LAST DIME I MAKE TO PAY FOR THIS PLACE AND BUY FOOD. WHAT ABOUT *CLOTHES*, MAUD? WE LOOK LIKE *RAGPICKERS!*

'I LISTENED FOR A WHILE, THEN TURNED AWAY. I SAW TWO BOYS PLAYING ACROSS THE STREET AND WALKED OVER...'

H'LO!

HEY, *YOU* MUST BE THE *NEW KID* THAT MOVED IN!

O' *COURSE* HE IS, STUPID. CAN'T YOU *TELL?* LOOK IT HIS *CLOTHES!*

'I WANTED TO BE FRIENDS AND PLAY WITH THEM, BUT THEIR MOM WAS ON THE PORCH...'

FRANKIE! GEORGIE! COME IN HERE THIS INSTANT!

S'LONG, *DOPEY! WE* GOTTA GO *IN!*

YEAH! MOM DON'T WANT US *PLAYIN'* WITH NO *POOR DOPES!*

'THEY MADE FUN OF ME, SO I WENT BACK ACROSS TO MY NEW HOUSE. MOM AND DAD WERE STANDING AT THE DOOR. I DIDN'T WANT THEM TO SEE ME CRYING, BUT I COULDN'T HELP IT...'

SOB... SOB...

SEE WHAT I *MEAN*, MAUD?

'AFTER DADDY WENT TO WORK, MOM TOOK ME TO THE BUTCHER SHOP. THE SAME LADY WAS THERE... THE ONE FROM ACROSS THE STREET. SHE DIDN'T SEE MOM AND ME COME IN AND WE COULD HEAR HER TALKING TO TWO OTHER LADIES...'

IT'S A *SHAME* WHEN PEOPLE LIKE *THAT* MOVE INTO A *DECENT NEIGHBORHOOD!*

A *DISGRACE*, IF YOU ASK ME...

AND THE *WAY* THAT CHILD IS *DRESSED!* WHY I THOUGHT I'D *DIE* WHEN I SAW FRANKIE AND GEORGIE *TALKING* TO HIM, MABEL!

DID YOU GET A *GOOD LOOK* AT THEM? NOBODY CAN TELL *ME* THERE ISN'T SOMETHING *WRONG* WITH THAT FAMILY!

'MOM GOT HER ORDER RIGHT AWAY AND SHE WALKED PAST THE LADIES WITHOUT LOOKING. BUT *I* LOOKED. THEY WERE STARING FUNNY AT US, AND THEY'D STOPPED TALKING...'

HELLO, LADY!

HMMMPH!

'WHEN I TALKED TO MOM ON THE WAY HOME, SHE TURNED HER HEAD AWAY LIKE *I* DO WHEN I *CRY* AND DON'T WANT ANYBODY TO *SEE* ME...'

WHY DIDN'T SHE SAY "HELLO", MOM! DON'T SHE *LIKE* US?

MAYBE IT'S THAT WE'RE *NEW* IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, BILLY. SHE...CHOKE...SHE DOESN'T *KNOW* US YET!

'THAT FIRST NIGHT, WE ATE IN THE KITCHEN BECAUSE WE DIDN'T HAVE NO TABLE OR CHAIRS IN THE DINING ROOM...'

I *TRIED* TO BE FRIENDLY, MAUD. I SAID "GOOD EVENING" TO THE GUY NEXT DOOR, BUT HE TURNED HIS *BACK* ON ME!

LIKE THE *LADY* DID IN THE *STORE* WHEN *I* SAID "HELLO," DADDY?

SO *YOU* GOT A DOSE OF IT *TOO*, HUH, MAUD? MAYBE *YOU* LIKE HAVIN' *YOUR* FACE RUBBED IN IT. *NOT ME!* I'M GETTIN' *OUT*...

SIT DOWN, IRA. PLEASE. *OKAY*, WE *GO!* BUT *WHERE?* FOR *TWO MONTHS* WE LOOKED. WE COULDN'T *FIND* A PLACE! GIVE THEM *TIME*, IRA! SHOW THEM WE'RE *GOOD PEOPLE*...

CRASH!

'THE ROCK SMASHED THROUGH THE WINDOW LIKE AN EXPLOSION. MOM JUMPED AND DAD GOT REAL MAD AND PICKED IT UP...'

SHOW 'EM WE'RE *GOOD*, EH? GOOD LIKE *THEY* ARE?! *I'LL* SHOW THE DIRTY STUCK-UP SNOBS...

IRA! WAIT!

'DAD WENT OUTSIDE FOR A MINUTE. WHEN HE CAME BACK HE LOOKED SO SAD...'

IT MUST'VE BEEN *KIDS*, IRA! DID YOU *SEE* ANYONE?

TOO DARK! WHAT'S THE *USE*, MAUD. DON'T YOU *SEE*? WE CAN'T *AFFORD* TO KEEP UP OUR PROPERTY LIKE THE REST! THEY *KNOW* IT! THEY WANT US *OUT!*

'MOM CAME OVER TO ME AND HELD ME TIGHT. SHE HOLLERED AT DADDY.'

I'M NOT GETTIN' OUT, IRA... NOT IF THEY BREAK EVERY WINDOW IN THE HOUSE. WE GOT A RIGHT TO STAY. YOU HEAR? WE GOT A RIGHT!

'DADDY DIDN'T SAY ANYMORE AND WE STAYED. BUT EVERY NIGHT, SOMETHIN' HAPPENED... LIKE MORE BROKEN WINDOWS... OR THE PAIL OF GARBAGE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN ON THE STEPS. DAD WOULD GET ALL RED, AND ONCE HE CHASED THE KIDS THAT DID IT AND THREW THE PAIL AT THEM...'

YOU DIRTY LITTLE *PIGS...*

'AND IT WASN'T *ONLY* KIDS! ONCE I WAS IN BED AND I HEARD NOISE OUTSIDE AND I LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW. I SAW THREE MEN, IN THE DARK, DUMPIN' ASHES FROM BIG CANS ON THE GRASS AND ON THE STEPS'...

'AND DADDY KEPT GETTIN' MADDER AND MADDER. SOMETIMES HE CAME HOME WALKIN' FUNNY, AND MOM WOULD HOLLER AGAIN...'

THAT'S JUST *FINE! YOU* KICK ABOUT NOT MAKING *ENDS MEET* AND YOU THROW *GOOD MONEY DOWN THE DRAIN!* WHAT ABOUT THE *NEIGHBORS* SEEING YOU COME HOME *SOUSED?*

NEIGHBORS! I WOULDN' *BE* LIKE THIS IF IT WASN'T FOR *THEM!* THEY CAN *ALL* GO TO *BLAZES!*

IRA, IF YOU *DON'T* CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO *YOU* AND *ME*, AT *LEAST* THINK OF *BILLY!* THINGS ARE *BAD ENOUGH* FOR HIM *AS IS!*

YOU MEAN THOSE *STUCK-UP BRATS* NOT *PLAYIN'* WITH HIM? *HE* AIN'T *MISSIN'* MUCH!

'DADDY WAS RIGHT! ALL THE TIME I KEPT ASKIN' THE KIDS TO PLAY WITH ME, BUT THEY WOULDN'T...'

WHY CAN'T I PLAY? I CAN BAT GOOD, I BET YUH...

'CAUSE YOU'RE POOR AND DIRTY. YOU SMELL! THAT'S WHY! YOU SMELL OUT LOUD!

'FRANKIE PUSHED ME AND I FELL AND THEY LAUGHED AT ME AND KEPT ON LAUGHIN' AT ME...'

YEAH! YOU SMELL JUST LIKE YOUR OLD MAN AND HIS OLD LADY!

WHY DON'T-CHA MOVE? WE DON'T WANT YOU HERE!

'I DIDN'T TELL DAD WHAT THE KIDS SAID, SO HE WOULDN'T GET MAD. BUT HE DID ANYWAY WHEN THE BOTTLE CAME IN THROUGH THEIR BEDROOM WINDOW AND SMASHED ON THE FLOOR THAT NIGHT...'

WATCH OUT FOR THE GLASS, IRA...

I GOT SHOES ON. LOOK, THERE WAS A NOTE IN THE BOTTLE!

'THE BOTTLE HAD AWAKENED ME, AND I HEARD EVERY WORD...'

KIDS AGAIN?

NO, THIS AIN'T NO KID'S WAY OF WRITIN'! "BE SMART. CLEAR OUT. WE DON'T WANT PEOPLE LIKE YOU RUINING OUR NEIGHBORHOOD. WE DON'T WANT YOUR BRAT AROUND OUR CHILDREN!" IT'S SIGNED..."A FRIEND." A FRIEND! THAT'S A JOKE FOR YOU! I WISH WHOEVER IT WAS WOULD DROP DEAD...

'DADDY GOT DRESSED FAST...'

WHERE YOU GOIN' IRA? DON'T GO LOSIN' YOUR TEMPER AND MAKIN' THINGS WORSE!

I'M GOIN' OUT AND GET COCKEYED IF YOU MUST KNOW... PLASTERED...

'I HID IN THE HALL SHADOWS. I THOUGHT DAD WAS GONNA SEE IF HE COULD CATCH SOMEBODY OUTSIDE, SO I SLIPPED DOWN AFTER HIM... BUT HE WAS GONE...'

'I STOOD FOR A WHILE IN THE MOONLIGHT. THEN I SHRUGGED AND WENT BACK INTO THE HOUSE...'

'IT WAS LATER WHEN I WOKE UP AND HEARD THE SIRENS AND PEOPLE RUNNIN' AND MOM OPENING HER WINDOW. I LOOKED OUT TOO, AND SAW POLICE CARS AND AN AMBULANCE AND TWO MEN CARRYIN' SOMETHIN' OUT OF FRANKIE AND GEORGIE'S HOUSE... ALL COVERED UP...'

WHAT'S THE MATTER, MOM?

I DON'T KNOW, BILLY! GO TO BED!

'I WASN'T SLEEPY SO I WENT INTO MOM'S ROOM. THE POLICEMEN WERE SEARCHIN' ALL OVER WITH FLASHLIGHTS. PEOPLE PASSED OUR HOUSE AND LOOKED UP FUNNY-LIKE. MOM CLOSED THE WINDOW. SHE LOOKED SCARED...'

WHERE'S DADDY, MOM?

I...I DON'T *KNOW*, BILLY!

'DADDY DIDN'T COME HOME TILL THE NEXT NIGHT. MOM SENT ME OUT OF THE KITCHEN BUT I LISTENED...'

IRA, THERE WAS *TROUBLE* IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD LAST NIGHT. *MR. GREELEY*...FROM *ACROSS THE STREET*... SOMEBODY *CLIMBED* INTO HIS *WINDOW* AND *CUT HIS THROAT*...

YEAH? WELL IT *COULDN'T* HAVE HAPPENED TO A *NICER GUY! I'D* LIKE TO SEE 'EM *ALL DEAD*, MAUD... *THE WHOLE ROTTEN PACK OF SNOBS*...

DON'T *TALK* THAT WAY, IRA! IT *SCARES* ME!

'DADDY WENT OUT AGAIN THAT NIGHT. MOM LOOKED SO WORRIED, AND WHEN HE CAME HOME LATE, I SNEAKED DOWNSTAIRS AND THEY WERE ARGUING...'

THINGS ARE *TOUGH ENOUGH* WITHOUT *YOU* SPENDING *MONEY* ON *DRINK. LOOK AT YOU!* HERE WE ARE TRYING TO MAKE PEOPLE *ACCEPT* US, AND YOU... *YOU*...

ACCEPT US!? HAH! THEY'D *NEVER* ACCEPT US... *DRUNK OR SOBER!*

'THE NEXT MORNING I WALKED DOWN TO WHERE THE CROWD WAS GATHERED BESIDE THE COOGAN HOUSE. THERE WERE POLICEMEN THERE AND A DEAD LADY WAS LYING IN THE GRASS NEAR THE BUSHES...'

WHOEVER *DID* IT CERTAINLY DIDN'T *LIKE* HER MUCH...THE WAY HER *FACE* IS MUTILATED...

MABEL COOGAN WAS A *FINE WOMAN*... NEVER HARMED A *SOUL*...

'SOME OF THE PEOPLE THERE LOOKED AT ME, AND ONE OF THEM WHISPERED TO A POLICEMAN...'

NOW... *LOOK*, LADY. JUST BECAUSE YOU DON'T *LIKE* A MAN DOESN'T MAKE HIM A *MURDERER!* YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE *PROOF!*

HE... HE *DRINKS!* AND *LOOK*... LOOK AT THE WAY HIS *CHILD* IS DRESSED...

'MOM CAME ALONG AND TOOK ME BY THE HAND AND STARTED TO PULL ME AWAY. THE LADY KEPT TALKIN' TO THE POLICEMAN... BUT SHE WAS STARING AT MOM...'

WE NEED *PROTECTION!* IT'S PLAIN THAT THERE'S A *MANIAC* LOOSE AROUND HERE!

COME ALONG, BILLY!

'THAT NIGHT, MOM AND DAD ARGUED AGAIN...'

PLEASE DON'T GO, IRA! PEOPLE ARE TALKING! PLEASE...

LET 'EM TALK!

'AND THE NEXT DAY...'

MR. WITTIER... STABBED SEVEN TIMES...

AWFUL! IT'S A MANIAC, ALL RIGHT!

MANIAC, EH? SOME PEOPLE GO INSANE FROM DRINK!

BELIEVE ME... IF I WERE RUNNING THE POLICE FORCE, I'D KNOW WHERE TO LOOK FOR THAT MURDERER...

'A POLICEMAN WALKED OUR STREET AT NIGHT AFTER THE THIRD MURDER AND NOBODY WAS DEAD FOR A WHILE. BUT DAD STILL KEPT GOING OUT AND DRINKING. ONE NIGHT MOM TRIED TO STOP HIM AND BURST OUT CRYING...'

YOU JUST DON'T KNOW HOW PEOPLE LOOK AT ME! YOU JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE SAYING.. SOB...

IT AIN'T BAD ENOUGH THEY'VE BEEN MAKING OUR LIVES MISERABLE FOR US... NOW, I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO GO OUT NIGHTS! WELL, I'M GOIN'...

'THE NEXT MORNING THE POLICE WERE ON OUR BLOCK AGAIN. ANOTHER BODY HAD BEEN FOUND...'

WE'D LIKE TO QUESTION YOUR HUSBAND, MA'AM. IS HE IN?

NO, HE'S AT WORK, OFFICER! HE'LL BE HOME ABOUT SIX...

'THAT NIGHT, WHEN DADDY CAME HOME, MOM TOLD HIM...'

THAT'S RIGHT! COPS WERE HERE! THEY WANT TO QUESTION YOU!

SO LET 'EM! I GOT NOTHING TO HIDE!

THERE WAS ANOTHER MURDER LAST NIGHT WHILE YOU WERE OUT!

ARE YOU ACCUSIN' ME, MAUD?

YES, I'M ACCUSING YOU! MAYBE YOU CAN'T REMEMBER! MAYBE YOU WERE TOO STINKING DRUNK!

YOU'RE CRAZY! I'M NEVER THAT DRUNK!

'MOM FLUNG OPEN THE KITCHEN TABLE DRAWER...'

THEN WHAT ABOUT *THIS?* THERE'S *BLOOD* ON THIS *KNIFE!*

GIVE ME THAT!

NO! I'M TURNING IT OVER TO THE POLICE!

MAUD... YOU ARE CRAZY! I NEVER KILLED ANYBODY! MAUD, GIVE ME THAT KNIFE...

CCCHHHKK...

MAUD!

'IT WAS AN ACCIDENT. THEY'D BEEN FIGHTING FOR THE KNIFE. MOMMY SLIPPED TO THE FLOOR. SHE GURGLED SOMETHING... THEN DIED...'

MAUD! OH, LORD! WHAT HAVE I *DONE!?*

MOMMY! MOMMY!

'DADDY LOOKED DOWN KIND OF STUPID-LIKE AT MOM LYING ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR WITH THE BIG CARVING KNIFE STICKING OUT OF HER CHEST. THEN HIS EYES GLAZED AND HE GRABBED THE SCISSORS ON THE SIDEBOARD...'

DADDY! NO!

UUUHHHH!

LITTLE BILLY'S VOICE TRAILED OFF. THE TWO DETECTIVES STIRRED UNEASILY ON THE WORN COUCH. ONE OF THEM GOT UP AND PUT HIS HAND ON THE BOY'S SHOULDER. THE OTHER SHOOK HIS HEAD...

GUESS THAT *WRAPS IT UP,* EH, DAVE? THE *GUY* SAVED THE *STATE* THE *TROUBLE...*

C'MON, BILLY! WE'LL HAVE TO TAKE YOU *DOWNTOWN* TO THE *CHILDREN'S SHELTER.*

WHY? WHY DID *MOMMY* AND *DADDY* HAVE TO DIE? I WAS *FIXING* THINGS FOR THEM. WE WERE GONNA BE *HAPPY* AGAIN...

THE TWO DETECTIVES EXCHANGED QUICK GLANCES...

"FIXING THINGS," BILLY? HOW DO YOU *MEAN...?*

ALL THOSE *OTHER PEOPLE* ...THE PEOPLE THAT WERE *NASTY* AND *AWFUL* TO US. *DADDY* WISHED THEY'D ALL BE *DEAD!* I WAS *FIXING* THINGS. NOW, I... *I KILLED THEM ALL FOR NOTHING!*

GOOD LORD! CHOKE...

THE END

DEAD CENTER

I FEEL STRANGELY WARM AND MY HANDS ARE STICKY WITH SWEAT AS I REACH DOWN AND SNAP ON THE TELEVISION SET. I TURN AWAY AS THE TUBES WITHIN HEAT UP AND A HIGH PITCHED SOUND OF A CHEERING CROWD STARTS MILES OFF AND GROWS IN VOLUME, FINALLY EXPLODING LOUDLY FROM THE SPEAKER. I NERVOUSLY LIGHT A CIGARETTE, AS THE SCREEN BEHIND ME BLINKS ON, GLOWING WHITE. I LISTEN TO THE ANNOUNCER'S DRONING VOICE... THE GRUNTS OF THE WRESTLERS... THE SCRAPING OF FLESH AND LEATHER ON CANVAS. AND I AM *AFRAID!* I AM AFRAID TO *TURN AROUND.* I AM AFRAID TO *FIND OUT*... TO FIND OUT FOR *SURE* ABOUT SELMA, MY WIFE, AND MILTY, MY BEST FRIEND. I AM AFRAID TO FIND OUT THAT WHAT I HAVE *SUSPECTED* MAY BE *NO JEALOUS FANTASY CONJURED UP IN MY MIND, BUT THE STARK BRUTAL TRUTH*... THAT *SELMA* AND *MILTY* ARE *HAVING AN AFFAIR BEHIND MY BACK*...

FOR A LONG WHILE I STAND, STUDYING THE WALL AND MY SHADOW CAST UPON IT BY THE FLUORESCENT SCREEN BEHIND ME. MY BROW IS DAMP WITH PERSPIRATION AND MY LIPS ARE DRY. I RAISE MY EYES TO THE CEILING AND PRAY... LIKE A CHILD... LIKE A FRIGHTENED CHILD ...

THEN I TURN... AND MY HEART STOPS. I STARE AT THE GLOWING PICTURE ON THE T.V. SCREEN... THE PICTURE OF TRUTH... TRUTH IN CRYSTAL-CLEAR BLACK AND WHITE...

THE MOUNTAINOUS HULKS OF THE WRESTLERS ARE THERE, GRAPPLING WITH EACH OTHER. THE REFEREE IS THERE, TOO... CIRCLING THE GRUNTING, GROANING CONTESTANTS...

BUT BEYOND... BEYOND THE CANVAS SQUARE RING... BEYOND THE VELVET COVERED ROPES... *THERE*... IN THE *FIRST ROW*... *SCREAMING* AT ME... *MOCKING* ME... SHOUTING *TRUTH* AT ME... ARE THE *TWO EMPTY SEATS*...

I CLOSE MY EYES AND SINK INTO A CHAIR AND SHAKE MY HEAD IN DISBELIEF. AND THE TEARS COME... THE SOBS... SHAKING MY TORTURED BODY...

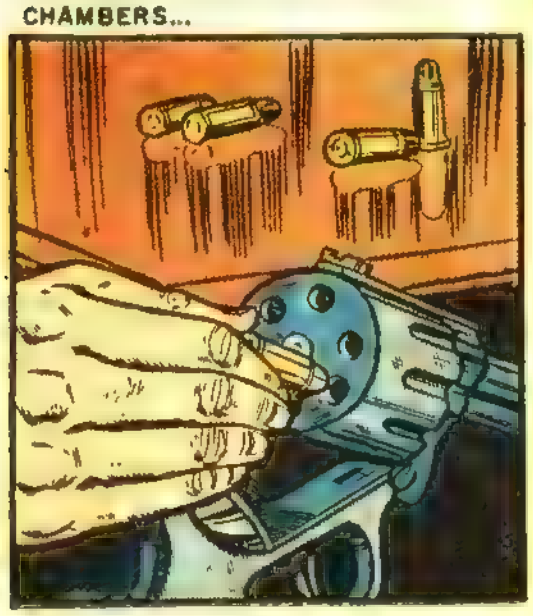
I SIT IN THE DARKNESS, LISTENING TO THE GLEEFUL CROWD-YELLS... THE BRUTE NOISES... THE CHASTIZING WORDS OF THE REFEREE. AND DOWN DEEP, A STORM GROWS WITHIN ME... AN ANGRY STORM... A VENGEFUL STORM...

THE STORM GROWS IN FURY... LASHING OUT AT *REASON*... DESTROYING *LOGIC*... A *JEALOUS* STORM... A STORM OF *HURT PRIDE*... A STORM OF *INDIGNATION*... A STORM SHRIEKING FOR *REVENGE*...

I STUMBLE INTO THE BEDROOM, YANK OPEN THE DRESSER DRAWER, AND PULL OUT *THE REVOLVER*...

ENJOY THESE DELICIOUS *MOMENTS* TOGETHER TONIGHT, SELMA AND MILTY! WHEREVER YOU ARE... *ENJOY* THEM! FOR THEY'LL BE YOUR *LAST* MOMENTS TOGETHER! YOUR *LAST!*

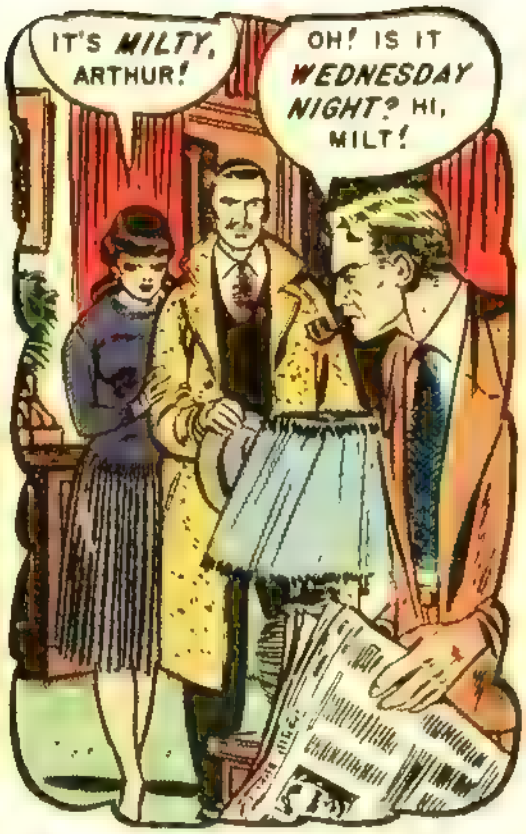
I SLIP THE GLEAMING COPPER-JACKETED BULLETS INTO THEIR CHAMBERS...

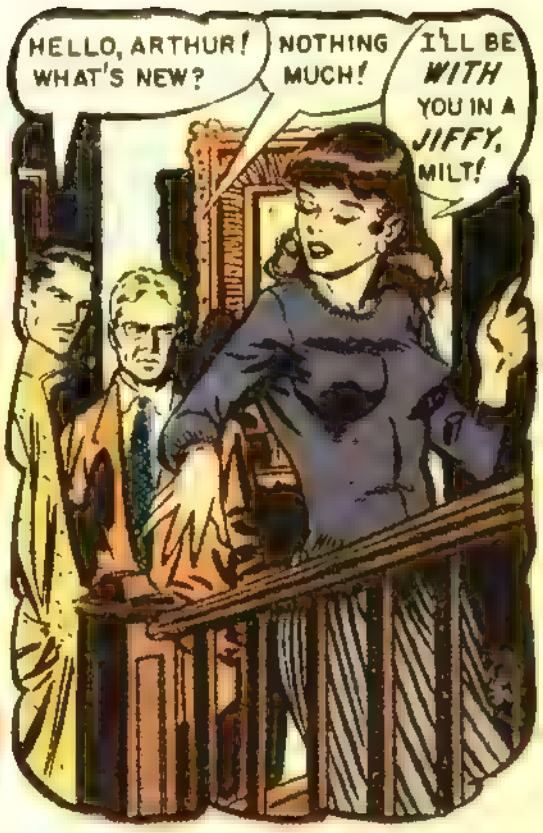


...COCK THE HAMMER...

...AND GO BACK INTO THE LIVING ROOM. I SIT DOWN IN THE CHAIR FACING THE FRONT DOOR. I SIT DOWN TO *WAIT* FOR THEM...

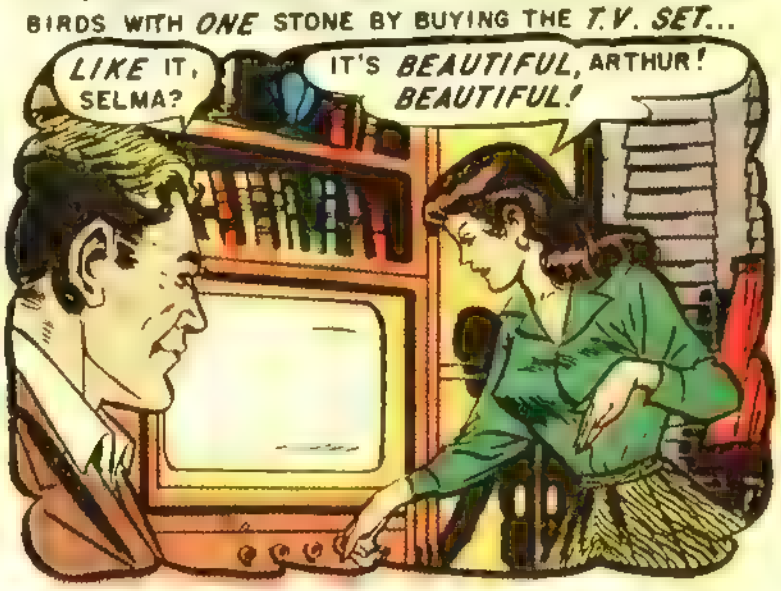
OUTSIDE, THE NEW YORK TRAFFIC HONKS AND SQUEALS. BESIDE ME, THE T.V. SET DRONES ON. I THINK BACK TO THE TIME WHEN I FIRST BEGAN TO SUSPECT ABOUT MILTY AND SELMA...





EVERY WEDNESDAY NIGHT, LIKE CLOCKWORK, MILTY, OUR BEST FRIEND, WOULD CALL FOR SELMA TO TAKE HER TO THE WRESTLING MATCHES AT THE ST. MARK'S ARENA HERE IN NEW YORK. SELMA WAS CRAZY ABOUT WRESTLING. I COULDN'T STAND IT! SO MILTY WOULD TAKE HER...

IN THE BEGINNING I DIDN'T MIND, BUT AFTER A WHILE, THAT REGULAR WEDNESDAY NIGHT DATE THEY USED TO HAVE BEGAN TO ANNOY ME. I THOUGHT I'D KILL *TWO* BIRDS WITH *ONE* STONE BY BUYING THE *T.V. SET*...



WELL, *GEE!* YOU DON'T SEEM *PLEASED*, SELMA!
SEEING THEM ON *T.V.* ISN'T LIKE *BEING* THERE *IN PERSON*, ARTHUR. YOU DON'T GET THE *EXCITEMENT* OF THE *CROWD*...

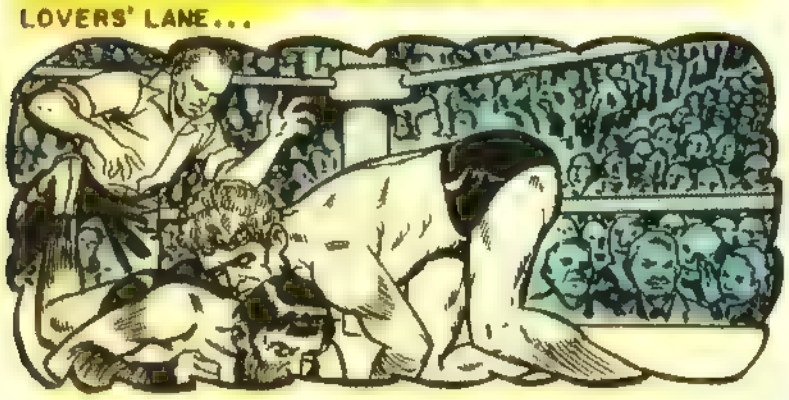
IT WAS *THEN*, I GUESS, WHEN I *BEGAN TO SUSPECT*...

AFTER THAT, EVERY SMILE... EVERY GLANCE... EVERY KNOWING LOOK MILTY AND SELMA EXCHANGED ONLY FED MORE *FUEL* TO MY *GROWING JEALOUS FIRE*...

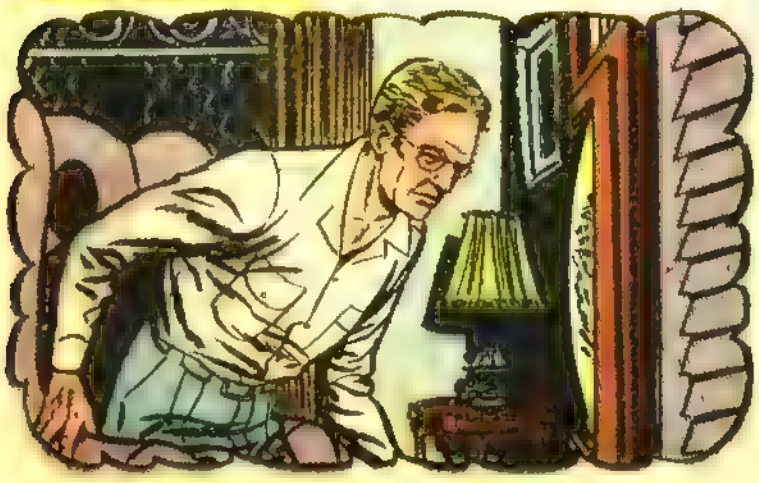
I BEGAN TO SEE THEM IN MY MIND'S EYE... *NOT* GOING TO THE ST. MARK'S ARENA AT *ALL* ON WEDNESDAY NIGHTS... BUT HURRYING TO SOME *TRYSTING PLACE*... WHISPERING... LAUGHING... IN EACH OTHER'S ARMS...

ONE WEDNESDAY NIGHT AFTER THEY'D LEFT, I COULDN'T WORK. I PACED THE LIVING ROOM NERVOUSLY, TORTURED BY MY JEALOUS THOUGHTS. ABSENTLY, I FLICKED ON THE T.V. SET.

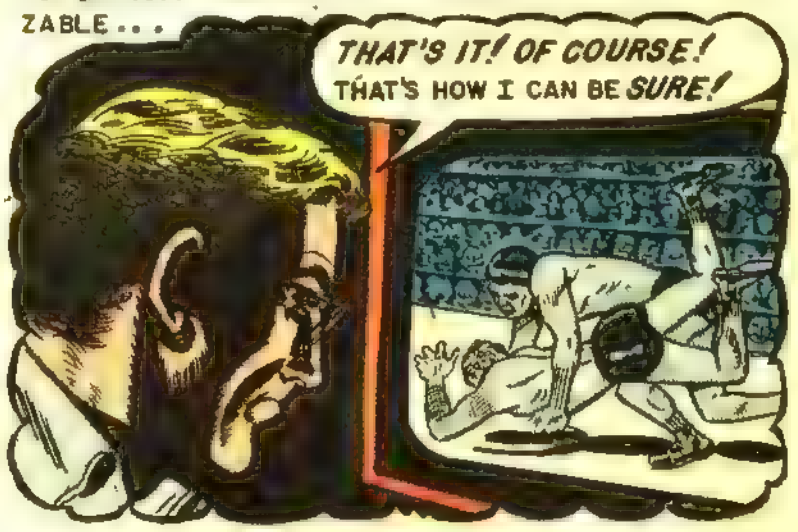
THE PICTURE CAME ON BRIGHT AND CLEAR... THE SOUND IRRITATING MY IRRITATED NERVES... ST. MARK'S ARENA... NEW YORK... WRESTLING. I STUDIED THE SCREEN... WATCHING THE MUSCULAR BRUTES THAT SELMA FOUND SO ATTRACTIVE... HATING THEM... HATING MILTY... AND WONDERING IF HE AND SELMA WERE REALLY THERE IN THEIR MEZZANINE SEATS... OR MILES AWAY IN SOME HOTEL ROOM OR FURNISHED FLAT OR SECLUDED LOVERS' LANE...



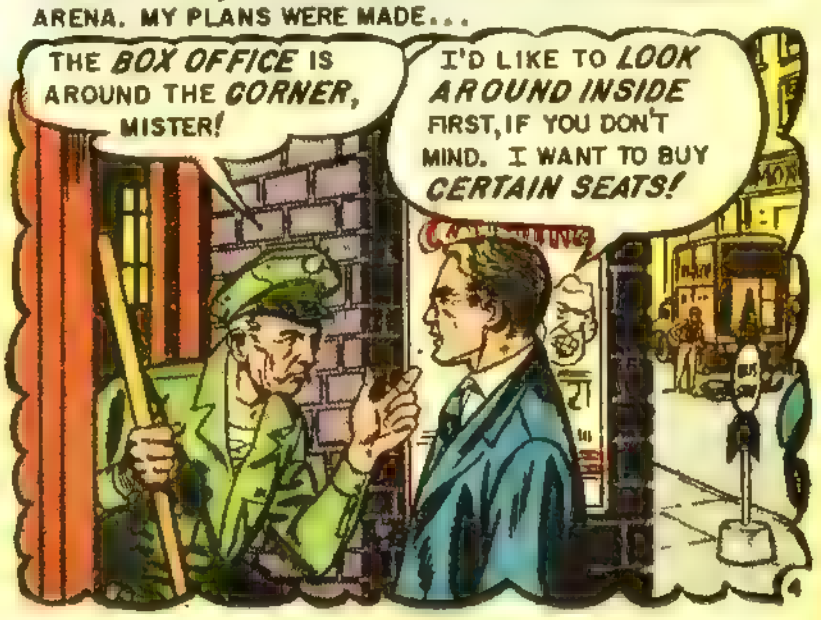
IF SELMA AND MILTY *WERE* THERE... THERE IN THE *FIRST ROW*... I COULD *SEE* THEM! I COULD BE *SURE!* BUT IF THEY *WEREN'T* THERE... IF THE SEATS WERE *EMPTY*... I'D *HAVE THE PROOF I NEEDED!*



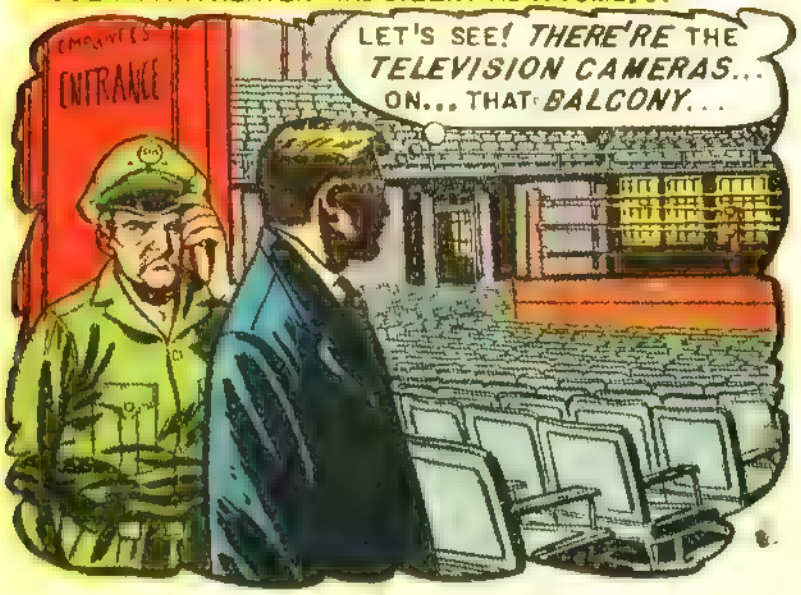
AND THEN I NOTICED THE FIRST ROW... BEYOND THE RING... THE FIRST ROW... WITH THE PEOPLE HOWLING AND EATING POPCORN AND ENJOYING THE SADISTIC PERFORMANCE... THEIR FACES... SO CLEAR... SO RECOGNIZABLE...



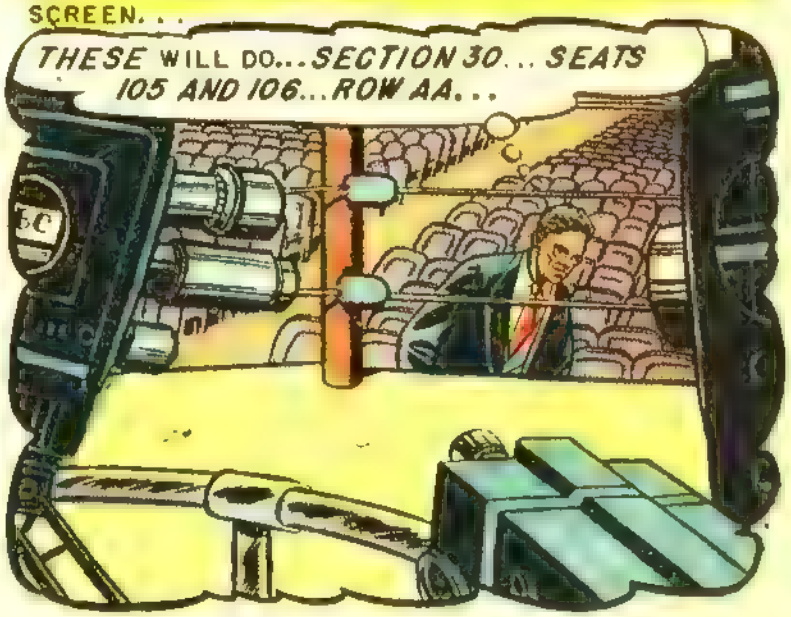
THE NEXT DAY, I TOOK A SUBWAY UP TO THE ST. MARK'S ARENA. MY PLANS WERE MADE...



A FIVE DOLLAR BILL CONVINCED THE REAR ENTRANCE GUARD THAT THERE'D BE NO HARM IN MY LOOKING AROUND THE EMPTY ARENA, AND I ENTERED. THE HUGE AMPHITHEATER WAS SILENT AS A TOMB...



I MOVED DOWN THE DESERTED AISLE, SKIRTED THE EMPTY RING, AND FOUND THE ROW OF SEATS OPPOSITE THE T.V. CAMERAS... THE ROW THAT APPEARED ON THE SCREEN...



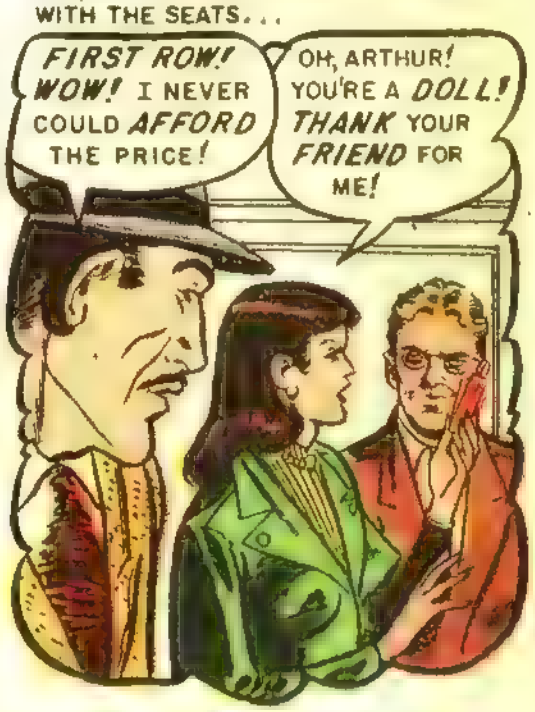
THEN I BOUGHT THOSE EXACT SEATS.

I'D LIKE TWO SEATS... RINGSIDE... SECTION 30... SEATS 105 AND 106... ROW AA... FOR THE FIRST AVAILABLE WEDNESDAY...
CAN LET YOU HAVE 'EM FOR TWO WEEKS FROM LAST NIGHT!

THE NEXT WEDNESDAY, WHEN MILTY CAME TO PICK UP SELMA, I TOLD THEM THE NEWS...

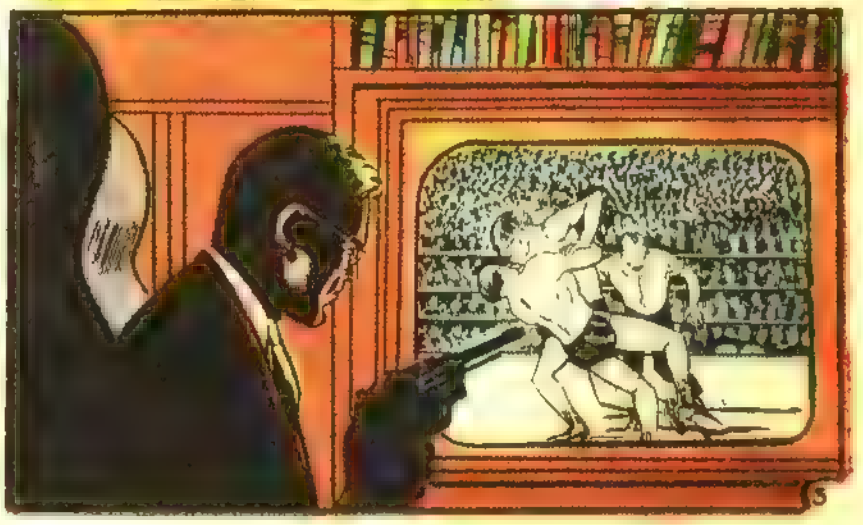
OH, BY THE WAY! DON'T BOTHER BUYING SEATS FOR NEXT WEDNESDAY, MILTY! A FRIEND GAVE ME TWO. I'D TAKE SELMA MYSELF ONLY YOU KNOW HOW I CAN'T STAND THE SPORT!

SELMA AND MILTY WERE THRILLED WITH THE SEATS...



TONIGHT, WHEN MILTY AND SELMA LEFT FOR THE ARENA, I KNEW I'D FIND OUT... ONCE AND FOR ALL...

SO I WAIT. I WAIT FOR THEM WITH LOADED GUN AND HATE-FILLED HEART. I HAVE MY PROOF! WHAT I FEARED IS TRUE! I SIT BESIDE THE T.V. SET WITH THE GRAPPLING HULKS AND THE CHEERING THRONG AND THE TWO EMPTY FIRST ROW SEATS... AND I WAIT...

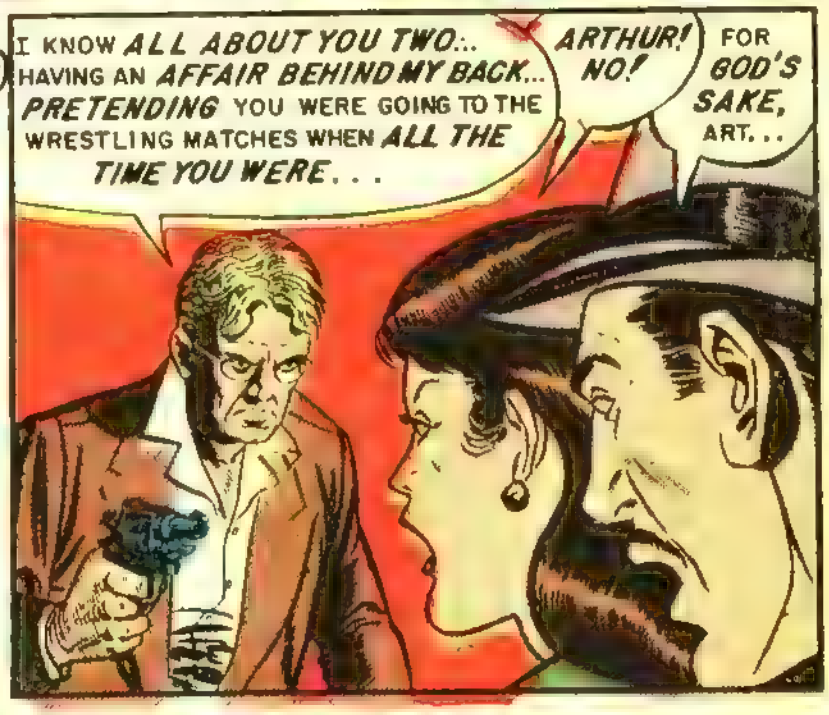


AT ABOUT 11:45 A KEY RATTLES IN THE FRONT DOOR LOCK. I STARE AT THE SET...

I TURN OFF THE VOLUME AND THE MUSCULAR MOUNDS CONTINUE CONTORTING IN SILENCE. THE DOOR OPENS...

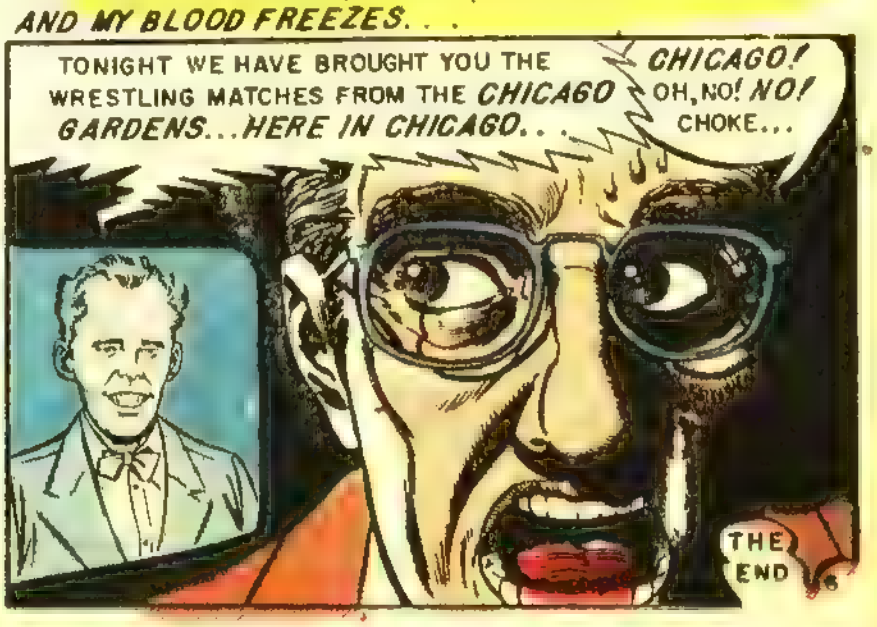
SELMA SNAPS ON THE LIGHT...

ART! WHAT'S THE IDEA OF THE GUN!
YOU CAN STOP YOUR LYING, YOU ROTTEN CHEATS. I KNOW! LOOK! THE SEATS I BOUGHT YOU ARE EMPTY! YOU CAME HOME TOO EARLY!
ARTHUR! YOU'RE *CRAZY!* WE...


I KNOW *ALL ABOUT YOU TWO*:.. HAVING AN *AFFAIR BEHIND MY BACK*... *PRETENDING* YOU WERE GOING TO THE WRESTLING MATCHES WHEN *ALL THE TIME YOU WERE...*
ARTHUR! NO!
FOR *GOD'S SAKE,* ART...

I EMPTY THE REVOLVER AT THEM... WIPING THEIR PROTESTING EXPRESSIONS FROM THEIR FACES IN A RED SMEAR. THEY FALL AT MY FEET...TWISTED... CONTORTED,..LIKE TWO TIRED WRESTLERS...THEIR DECEIT DEAD,..LIKE THEM!

I STAND THERE, LISTENING TO THE GUN SHOTS ECHOING AWAY INTO SILENCE... LISTENING TO THE FOOTSTEPS TRAMPING OUT IN THE HALL. ABSENTLY, I TURN UP THE T.V. SET VOLUME... *AND MY BLOOD FREEZES...*


TONIGHT WE HAVE BROUGHT YOU THE WRESTLING MATCHES FROM THE *CHICAGO GARDENS...HERE IN CHICAGO...*
CHICAGO! OH, NO! *NO!* CHOKE...
THE END

A SPECIAL EDITORIAL

THIS IS AN APPEAL FOR ACTION!

THE PROBLEM: Comics are under fire . . . horror and crime comics in particular. Due to the efforts of various "do-gooders" and "do-gooder" groups, a large segment of the public is being led to believe that certain comic magazines cause juvenile delinquency, warp the minds of America's youth, and affect the development of the personalities of those who read them! Among these "do-gooders" are: a psychiatrist who has made a lucrative career of attacking comic magazines, certain publishing companies who do not publish comics and who would benefit by their demise, many groups of adults who would like to blame their lack of ability as responsible parents on comic mags instead of on themselves, and various assorted headline hunters. These people are militant. They complain to local police officials, to local magazine retailers, to local wholesalers, and to their congressmen. They complain and complain and threaten and threaten. Eventually, everyone gets frightened. The newsdealer gets frightened. He removes the books from display. The wholesaler gets frightened. He refuses shipments. The congressmen get frightened . . . November is coming! They start an investigation. This wave of hysteria has seriously threatened the very existence of the whole comic magazine industry.

WE BELIEVE: Your editors sincerely believe that the claim of these crusaders . . . that comics are bad for children . . . is *nonsense.* If we, in the slightest way, thought that horror comics, crime comics, or any other kind of comics were harmful to our readers, we would cease publishing them and direct our efforts toward something else!

And we're not alone in our belief. For example: Dr. David Abrahamsen, eminent criminologist, in his book, "Who Are The Guilty?" says, "Comic books do not lead to crime, although they have been widely blamed for it . . . In my experience as a psychiatrist, I cannot remember having seen one boy or girl who has committed a crime, or who became neurotic or psychotic . . . because he or she read comic books." A group led by Dr. Freda Kehm, Mental Health Chairman of the Ill. Congress of the P. T. A., decided that living room violence has "a decided beneficial effect on young minds." Dr. Robert H. Felix, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, said that horror comic books do not originate criminal behavior in children . . . in a way, the horror comics may do some good . . . children may use fantasy, as stimulated by the "comics" as a means of working out natural feelings of aggressiveness.

We also believe that a large portion of our total readership of horror and crime comics is made up of adults. We believe that those who oppose comics are a small minority. Yet this minority is causing the hysteria. The voice of the *majority* . . . you who buy comics, read them, enjoy them, and are not harmed by them . . . has not been heard!

WHAT YOU MUST DO: Unless you act now, the pressure from this minority may force comics from the American scene. It is members of this minority who threaten the local retailers, who threaten the local wholesalers, who have sent letters to the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency (now investigating the comic industry).

IT IS TIME THAT THE MAJORITY'S VOICE BE HEARD!

It is time that the Senate Subcommittee hears from YOU . . . *each and every one of you!*

If you agree that comics are harmless entertainment, write a letter or a postcard *TODAY* . . to:

The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency
United States Senate
Washington 25, D. C.

and in your own words, tell them so. Make it a nice, polite letter! In the case of you younger readers, it would be more effective if you could get your parents to write for you, or perhaps add a P.S. to your letter, as the Senate Subcommittee may not have much respect for the opinions of minors.

Of course, if you or your parents *disagree* with us, and believe that comics ARE bad, let your sentiments be known on that too! The important thing is that the Subcommittee hear from actual comic book readers and/or their parents, rather than from people who never read a comic magazine in their lives, but simply want to destroy them.

It is also important that your local newsdealer be encouraged to continue carrying, displaying, and selling *all kinds* of comics. Speak to him. Have him speak to his wholesaler.

Wherever you can, let your voice and the voices of your parents be raised in protest over the campaign against comics.

But first . . . *right now* . . . please write that letter to the Senate Subcommittee.

Sincerely,
Your grateful editors
(for the whole E. C. Gang)

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ZENITH CO., Dept. LB-1
81 Willoughby St., Brooklyn 1, N. Y.

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Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone..... State .....

E.C. WENT TO SEA

IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER NEW TREND...

AND WE CAME UP WITH...

SAGAS OF THE SEA, SHIPS, PLUNDER AND...

PIRACY

NOW YOU SEARCH FOR IT!

BUT IF YOU *CAN'T FIND PIRACY* AT YOUR LOCAL NEWSSTAND, YOU CAN *SUBSCRIBE!* JUST FILL OUT THE COUPON AND MAIL, TOGETHER WITH *ONE HUNDRED PIECES OF CENT* (THAT'S ONE BUCK, LAND-LUBBERS!), TO:

THE SEASICK EDITORS OF
PIRACY
ROOM 706
225 LAFAYETTE STREET
N.Y.C. 12, N.Y.

OKAY, BILGE RATS! YOU SHANGHAIED ME! I ENCLOSE $1.00 FOR THE NEXT EIGHT ISSUES OF *PIRACY!*

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZONE NO. _____

GREEN STUFF

Sam pointed to the green plants crowded into the back of the truck, and a smile of accomplishment crossed his puffy face. He leaned forward and plucked one of the shiny leaves from the wet burlap in which each plant was wrapped, rubbing the leaf between his fingers vigorously. "There's the load, Mr. Tendril," he said in his husky, ex-pug's voice. "Delivered like we said it'd be!"

Mr. Tendril's watery eyes moved from the back of the loaded truck to the leaf in Sam's hand to the bulky prizefighter's face. "H-How'd you get your hands on . . . on . . . ?"

Sam hacked, to clear his throat, placing the bruised leaf between his teeth as if sucking on a blade of grass. "Me and Monk was hanging around this here big florist and nursery place, Mr. Tendril, doing some odd jobs . . . and keeping our ear open. Casing the joint, you might say. Then . . . *you* tell the rest, Monk."

Monk wiped his weasel face nervously, patted his bald spot to make certain it was in place, then spoke in a grating nasal voice . . . the voice of a discredited fight manager on the lam from the law.

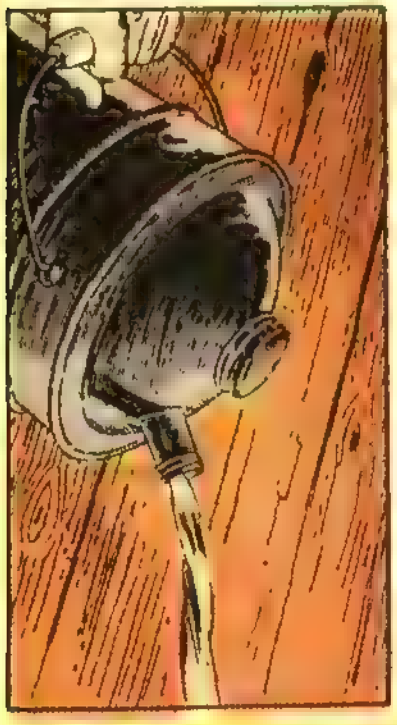
"We find out there's this big shipment of green stuff going to the estate of a doll named Mamie Silverplate," he whined in a confidential tone. "Now everyone's heard of this Silverplate frail . . . she's got more dough than a goose has pimples. And if you read any of the daily colyums you know that her pride and joy is the priceless flowers and shrubs she grows. Soon as I heard there was a shipment heading HER way, I was alerted, see? A babe like that must be ordering stuff that's worth a fortune, I reason . . . stuff that a flower-fancier who don't ask too many questions might be glad to get his hands on. Foller me?

"These here valuable plants is loaded aboard the truck, and me and Sam just hops into the back . . . we flatten ourself out right in among these sensational flowers, so as not to be spotted. And the truck takes off, with us hugging the greenery, flat on our faces . . . and already thumbing through the folding money this beautiful stuff is sure to bring us. We drive for mebbe twenny minutes when I creep forward and jam a finger into the driver's back, announcing that it's a holdup. The jerk pulls over to the side of the road, like I order. He ain't too agreeable to the hi-jacking we got in mind . . . yammering about this load of plants is supposed to be dumped in a field where the Silverplate doll don't wanna be bothered by trespassers . . . but that malarkey don't fool ME! Sam taps the driver on the noggin, we dump his frame into a ditch to think things over when he comes to, and we sashay over to YOUR place. Now, you looked these expensive plants over, Mr. Tendril . . . what'll the whole batch bring us?"

Mr. Tendril's watery eyes rolled, as he stared at the tiny red bubbles beginning to appear in profusion around Sam's puffy mouth. "Toxicodendron Radicans," he murmured. "W-What will the whole batch bring you?" he added thoughtfully. "Probably the most torturous itch either of you has ever encountered, gentlemen. And my fervent request that you remove this truckload of POISON IVY from my premises immediately. As I warned you before, this hi-jacking habit of yours would eventually lead to rash consequences!"

THE FIREBUG

A PINKISH STREAM OF GASOLINE GURGLES FROM A CAN...

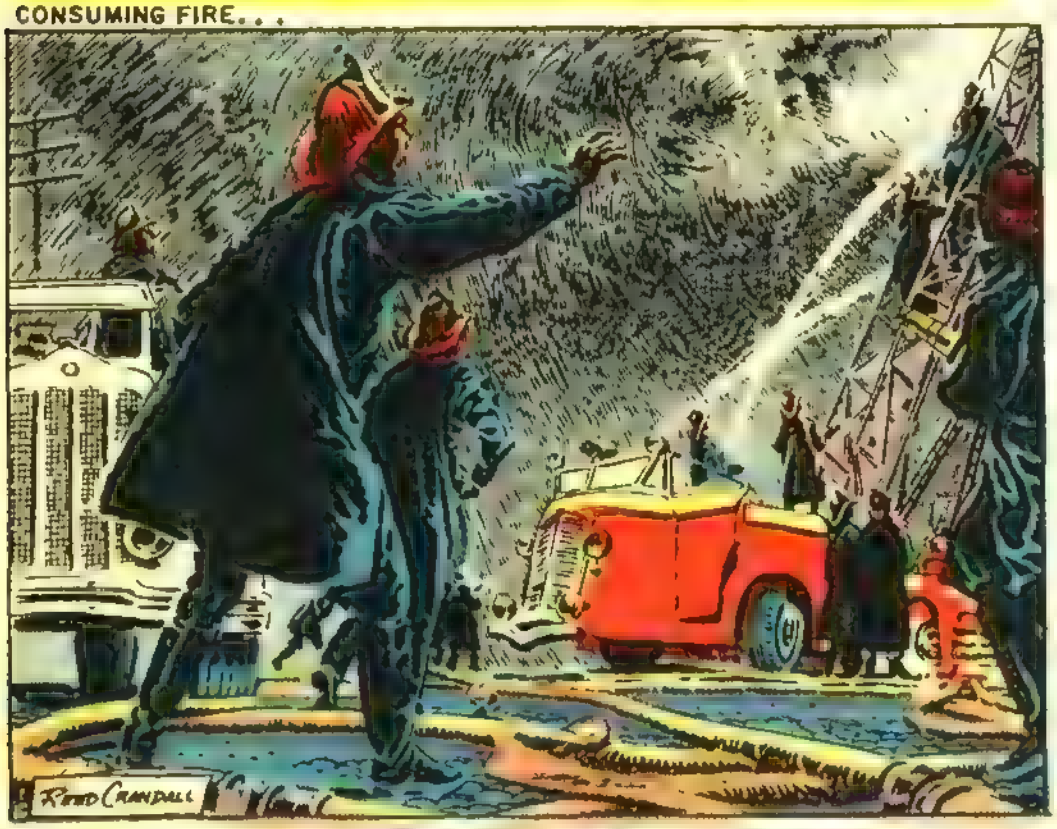


...DOWN UPON A MASS OF COTTON BATTING... SOAKING IN...

A TINY FLAME FLICKERS... A MATCH, CUPPED LOVINGLY IN A PYROMANIAC'S HANDS...

THE MATCH IS TOUCHED EAGERLY TO THE GASOLINE-SOAKED COTTON BATTING, FLASHING UP IN A LICKING ORANGE SHEET OF FLAME...

...AND IN HALF AN HOUR, FIRE ENGINES HAVE SCREAMED TO THE SCENE OF A FOUR ALARM WAREHOUSE BLAZE. RUBBER-CLAD SMOKE-EATERS ARE SCURRYING UP LATTICE FINGERS THAT REACH INTO THE NIGHT SKY, DRAGGING THEIR MILES OF HOSE, EMPTYING JET-STREAMS INTO WINDOWS THAT BELCH FORTH SUFFOCATING CLOUDS OF BLACK SMOKE AND CRACKLING TONGUES OF CONSUMING FIRE...



AND IN THE MIDST OF THE CONFUSION... DIRECTING HIS SCRAMBLING MEN, SHOUTING ORDERS, AND SURVEYING THE BLAZING CONFLAGRATION... STANDS MITCHELL SLADE, FIRE CHIEF...

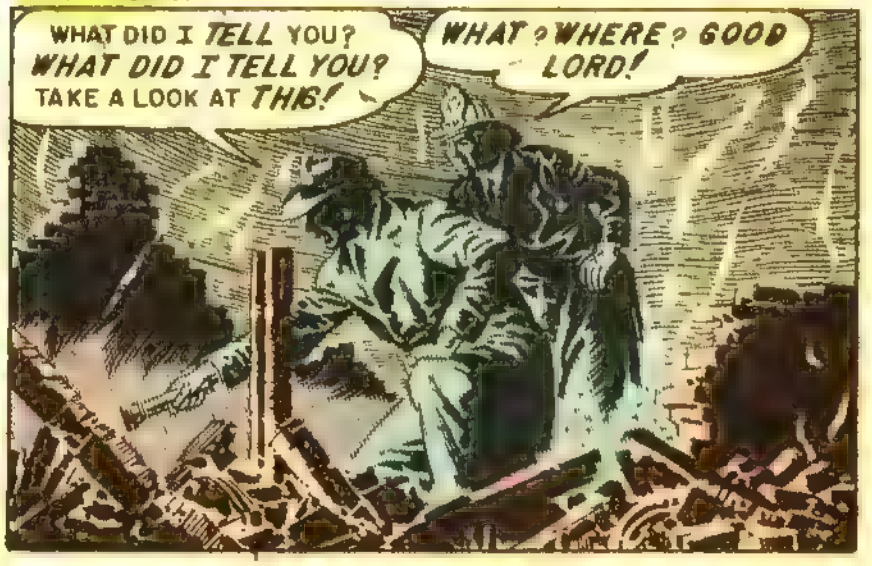
IT TAKES ALL NIGHT AND INTO THE GREY DAWN TO SUBDUE THE SMOKING KILLER... THE LICKING HOT DESTROYER. CHIEF SLADE IS THERE... ALL THE TIME... WATCHING... APPROVING... CRITICIZING... SHOUTING... CAJOLING. AND IN THE MORNING, ANOTHER MAN STANDS BESIDE HIM.. A MAN IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES...

WELL, I'VE GOT *MY* JOB, *TOO,* CHIEF. HOW SOON WILL IT BE *COOL* ENOUGH TO TAKE A LOOK AROUND?
STILL ON THAT *PYROMANIAC* TACK, LIEUTENANT?

EIGHT FIRES IN AS *MANY WEEKS*... AND *ALL BIG ONES*... WAREHOUSE... LOFTS... FACTORIES... IT SURE *SMELLS* LIKE AN *ARSONIST'S* WORK.
BUT YOU'VE FOUND NO *PROOF!*

THIS FIREBUG IS *REAL CLEVER,* SLADE. HE *KNOWS* HIS *BUSINESS.* HE MAKES *SURE* THERE *IS NO PROOF!* BUT *ONE* OF THESE DAYS, HE'LL *MAKE A MISTAKE!*
WELL, *GO LOOK FOR MISTAKES,* SHERLOCK! THE BOYS HAVE WET THE PLACE DOWN PRETTY THOROUGHLY.

CHIEF SLADE FOLLOWS LIEUTENANT HUMPHRIES OF THE POLICE ARSON SQUAD, CURIOUSLY PEERING OVER HIS SHOULDER AS THE DETECTIVE PRODS THROUGH THE CHARRED RUINS. AND THEN...



LIEUTENANT HUMPHRIES LIFTS THE STILL HOT BLACKENED CAN WITH A WATER LOGGED STICK...

THE *INSIDE IS BLACK, TOO!* THAT MEANS ONLY *ONE THING! GASOLINE!* THE ARSONIST MUST HAVE *LEFT* IT HERE *ACCIDENTALLY*... IN HIS *HASTE!*
WELL I'LL BE...! THEN YOU'VE BEEN *RIGHT ALL ALONG!*

CHIEF SLADE'S FACE DARKENS. HIS EYES BLAZE ANGRILY...

WE'VE GOT TO *GET* HIM, HUMPHRIES. *TWO* OF MY *BOYS* HAVE *DIED* IN FIRES HE'S STARTED. WE'VE GOT TO MAKE HIM *PAY!*
TAKE IT *EASY,* SLADE. *YOU* JUST *FIGHT* THE *FIRES!* TRACKING DOWN A *FIREBUG* IS THE *ARSON SQUAD'S JOB!*

IN HIS DARKENED APARTMENT LATE THAT NIGHT, THE PYROMANIAC CURSES HIMSELF ANGRILY...

STUPID IDIOT! LEAVING THE CAN! NOW THEY *KNOW FOR SURE* THAT THOSE FIRES WEREN'T *ACCIDENTS!* NOW THEY'LL *TRACK ME DOWN!* I'VE GOT TO *STOP THEM...*

THEN HE GOES TO THE PHONE... A PLAN FORMING IN HIS MIND. HE DIALS A NUMBER... AND...

HELLO? IS THIS *STEVE BOGAN'S* PLACE? THAT *YOU*, STEVE? *LISTEN!* THIS IS A *FRIEND!* HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE A *C-NOTE* TONIGHT? THIS IS WHAT YOU DO...

AND SO, AFTER MIDNIGHT, LIEUTENANT HUMPHRIES OF THE ARSON SQUAD RECEIVES AN URGENT PHONE CALL..

WHAT'S THE IDEA OF WAKING ME UP AT *THIS* HOUR, SLADE! IT'S NEARLY ONE...

I JUST GOT A *CRAZY CALL* FROM SOMEONE, LIEUTENANT! THERE'S GOING TO BE A *FIRE* TONIGHT!

WHAT!? THAT'S *RIGHT!* ACCORDING TO THIS TIPSTER, THE *AJAX WAREHOUSE IS GOING TO BURN DOWN!*

IT MAY BE A *CRANK CALL*, SLADE! *STILL*... I'D BETTER *INVESTIGATE!* THANKS FOR THE...

I'LL MEET YOU THERE IN *FIFTEEN MINUTES*, AND WHEN I GET MY *HANDS* ON THAT PYRO...

LISTEN, SLADE! THIS IS *MY* JOB... *NOT YOURS!* *I'LL* DO THE INVESTIGATING *ALONE!* YOU... YOU... *SLADE? YOU THERE? SLADE!*

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, LIEUTENANT HUMPHRIES ARRIVES AT THE AJAX WAREHOUSE. HE MOVES AROUND THE BUILDING STEALTHILY, INSPECTING EACH ENTRANCE DOOR... EACH WINDOW...

THIS ONE'S BEEN *JIMMIED!* THAT *TIP* MAY HAVE BEEN *ON THE LEVEL!* THE *PYRO'S* PROBABLY *INSIDE!*

HUMPHRIES SLIPS INTO THE WAREHOUSE... QUIETLY... SCARCELY BREATHING. HE LISTENS .

THIS IS A *BIG PLACE!* NOW TO *FIND* HIM! WHERE WOULD A PYRO... *WHAT'S THAT? SMOKE!* BY GOD, I'M *TOO LATE!*

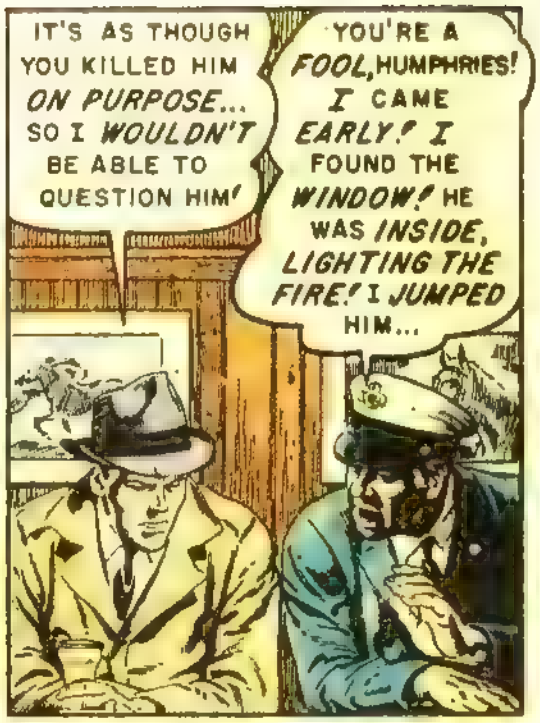
HUMPHRIES STARTS TOWARD THE SMOKE AND THE FLICKERING FLAME... AND THEN HE SEES THE STRUGGLING FIGURES...

LIEUTENANT HUMPHRIES PULLS OUT HIS GUN...

BUT CHIEF SLADE IGNORES THE POLICE LIEUTENANT'S ORDER...

IT IS LATER. THEY SIT IN A SMALL BAR... SLADE, THE FIRE CHIEF... AND HUMPHRIES, THE ARSON SQUAD LIEUTENANT...

HOW DO I *KNOW?* HOW DO I KNOW *HE* STARTED ALL THE *OTHER FIRES?* HOW DO I KNOW *ANYTHING?*
YOU *DON'T,* LIEUTENANT! HE CAN'T *TELL* YOU NOW! HE'S *DEAD!*


IT'S AS THOUGH YOU KILLED HIM *ON PURPOSE...* SO I *WOULDN'T* BE ABLE TO QUESTION HIM!
YOU'RE A *FOOL,* HUMPHRIES! *I* CAME *EARLY!* I FOUND THE *WINDOW!* HE WAS *INSIDE, LIGHTING THE FIRE!* I *JUMPED* HIM...

THE LIEUTENANT TAKES THE FLICKERING MATCH... LIGHTING HIS CIGARETTE... DRAWING IN THE ORANGE FLAME ..

HE STARTS TO SHAKE IT OUT BUT CHIEF SLADE TOUCHES HIS WRIST... THE FIRELIGHT DANCING IN HIS WIDE GLAZED EYES...

THE CHIEF STARES AT THE MATCH FLAME... ENTRANCED... ENTHRALLED... HYPNOTIZED...

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STYLE #400

Snake-Zebra Design—Printed Plastic can be used on either side. Gives snappy distinctive dress up appearance. Front or Rear Seat only **$2.98**

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ORDER FROM MANUFACTURER AND SAVE!

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- ☐ I enclose payment ☐ Send C.O.D.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zone ___ State ___

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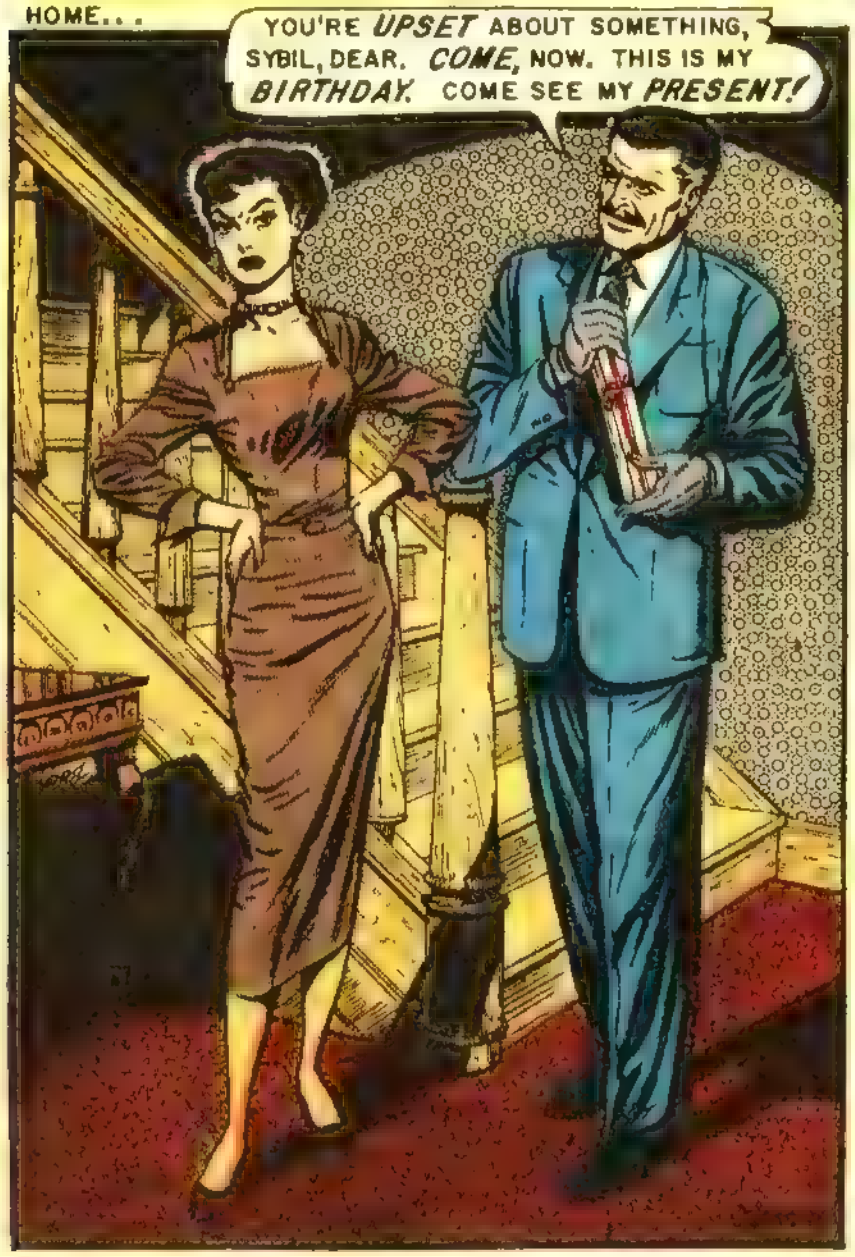
COMEBACK

FROM THE MOMENT HE'D ENTERED HIS LAVISH APARTMENT, RAYMOND OLIVER'D FELT THE AIR OF TENSION... THE TAUT ATMOSPHERE... LIKE A HARPSTRING THAT HAD BEEN PLUCKED AND NOW SCREAMED IN SUCH HIGH FREQUENCY VIBRATIONS THAT THE SOUND WAS INAUDIBLE TO HIS HUMAN EAR. AND YET HE SENSED IT...THE SILENT SHRILLNESS...THE MUTE SHRIEK. SYBIL HAD COLDLY TURNED HER CHEEK TO HIS FORCED CHEERFUL GREETING. RAYMOND HAD ALWAYS BEEN SENSITIVE TO HIS WIFE'S MOODS, BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING MORE THIS TIME...SOMETHING DEEPER...SOMETHING OMINOUS. HE TOOK OFF HIS HOMBURG, SLIPPED OUT OF HIS VELVET-COLLARED TOPCOAT AND, WITHOUT REMOVING HIS CAPESKIN GLOVES, NERVOUSLY FUMBLED WITH THE GOLD CORD OF THE RE-TIED GIFT-WRAPPED PACKAGE HE'D BROUGHT HOME...



RAYMOND TORE OPEN THE PACKAGE AND TURNED TO SHOW IT TO HIS WIFE. SYBIL'S EYES HAD THE QUALITY OF TEMPERED STEEL, AND AN IRONIC SMILE PLAYED ABOUT HER THIN LIPS...

RAYMOND FELT HIS BLOOD TURN TO ICE IN HIS VEINS. HE FELT HIS HEART STOP.. THEN START AGAIN LIKE A TYMPANI DRUM... BOOMING IN HIS CHEST. HE TRIED TO LOOK SURPRISED AND INNOCENT AND SHOCKED...

LIAR!? WHAT... WHAT DO YOU *MEAN?* I...
I *MEAN*, MR. VICE PRESIDENT, I'VE BEEN *AWARE* FOR *SOME TIME* OF WHAT YOU'VE BEEN *UP TO*. I'VE BEEN HAVING YOUR YOUNG WOMAN *FOLLOWED!* I *KNOW SHE BOUGHT THAT DESK SET*. OH, YOU'RE A *FOOL*, RAYMOND!

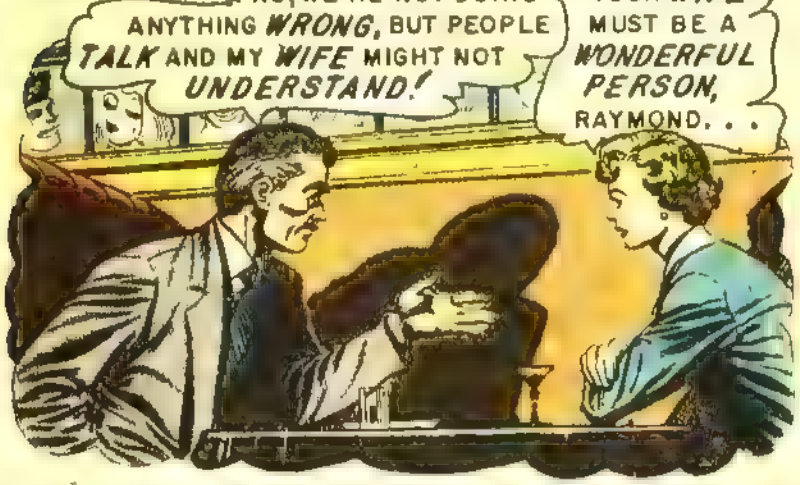
RAYMOND SLUMPED INTO A CHAIR, DEFLATED. HE COULD NOT LOOK AT HER NOW. . . NOW, AS SYBIL'S VOICE RANG WITH BITTER JEALOUSY AND INDIGNATION . . .

JOYCE ADAMS, ISN'T THAT HER NAME, RAYMOND? SHE'S VERY PRETTY, TOO! AND HOW CONVENIENT FOR YOU . . . A CASHIER IN THE SAME BANK!
I'M . . . I'M SORRY, SYBIL!

SORRY!? ABOUT WHAT? SORRY THAT YOU WEREN'T QUITE AS DISCREET AS YOU THOUGHT? SORRY THAT NOW YOU'LL HAVE TO TELL YOUR CHEAP LITTLE TRAMP THAT THE WHOLE SORDID AFFAIR IS OVER?

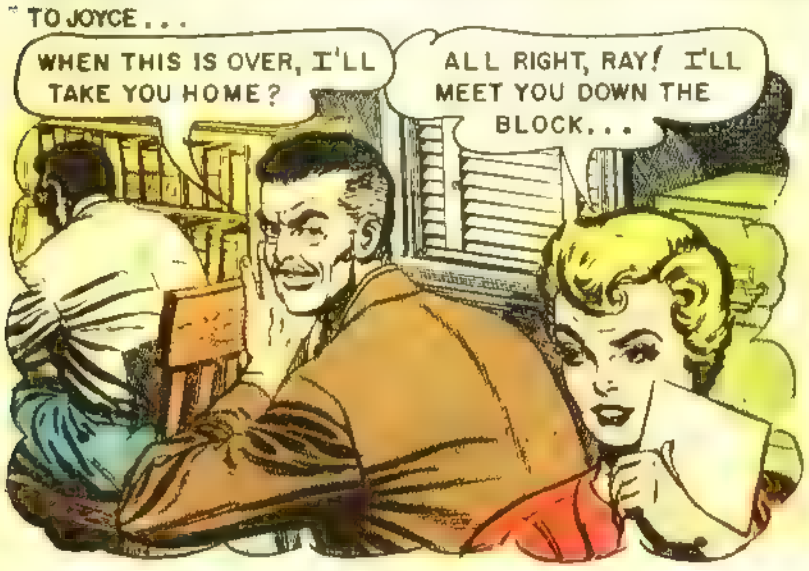
SYBIL RANTED ON, AND RAYMOND LISTENED WITHOUT HEARING. HE WAS THINKING OF JOYCE NOW . . . AND HOW IT WAS WHEN HE WAS WITH HER. HE FINGERED THE DESK SET ABSENTLY WITH HIS GLOVED HAND AS SYBIL RAVED. HE REMEMBERED THAT FIRST TIME HE'D ASKED JOYCE TO LUNCH . . .

RAYMOND LIKED TO REMEMBER THAT FIRST MEETING WITH JOYCE, WHEN SHE'D WAITED FOR HIM AT THAT SECLUDED UPTOWN CAFE. IT'D BEEN A LARK THEN . . . A THRILLING LITTLE BREAK IN HIS LIFE'S BLEAK ROUTINE . . .


NO, WE'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING WRONG, BUT PEOPLE TALK AND MY WIFE MIGHT NOT UNDERSTAND!
YOUR WIFE MUST BE A WONDERFUL PERSON, RAYMOND . . .

RAYMOND'D BEEN CHARMED BY JOYCE'S NAIVETE AND THEN HE'D BEEN PLEASED WITH HER FRANKNESS AND WITH HAVING HIS EGO SO BOOSTED

AFTER THAT, THERE'D BEEN MORE SECRET MEETINGS. THEN, ONE NIGHT, THERE'D BEEN A LATE CONFERENCE OF THE ENTIRE STAFF. HE'D GOTTEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO WHISPER TO JOYCE . . .

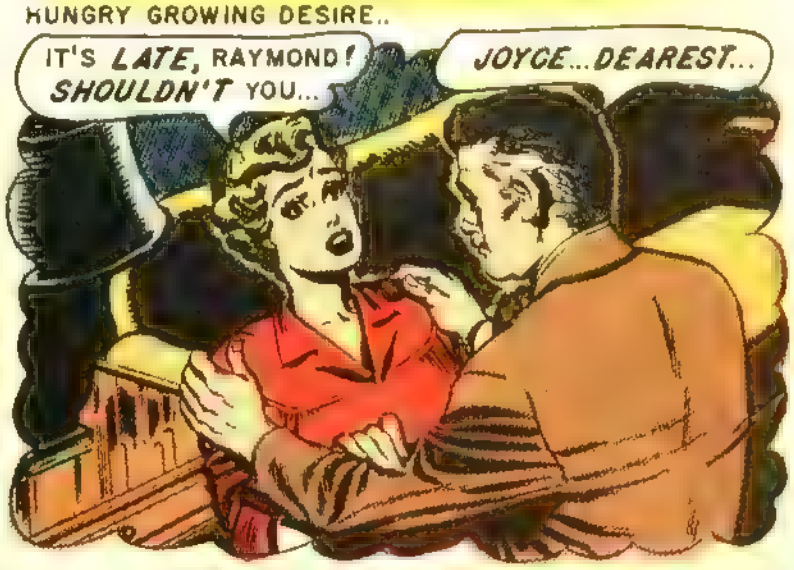


AFTER THE CONFERENCE, RAYMOND'D WAITED TILL EVERYONE HAD GONE. THEN HE'D LOCKED UP AND WALKED DOWN TO WHERE JOYCE WAS WAITING BENEATH A STREETLAMP, THE LIGHT GLEAMING ON HER GOLDEN HAIR . . .

THEY'D STOPPED AT A BAR NEAR JOYCE'S APARTMENT WHERE, MELLOWED WITH THE KINDLING WARMTH OF A FEW HIGHBALLS, RAYMOND'D EMPTIED HIS HEART TO JOYCE, AS UNHAPPY MEN ARE WONT TO DO, ABOUT HIS MARITAL WOES. SHE LISTENED SYMPATHETICALLY...

SHE... SHE'S *MY AGE* AND YET SHE *ACTS* LIKE A WOMAN OF *SIXTY*. SHE'S *COLD* AND *CALLOUSED* AND *UNAFFECTIONATE*...
IT MUST BE VERY *DIFFICULT* FOR YOU!

PHILANDERING HAD BEEN A COMPLETE NOVELTY TO RAYMOND AND HE'D APPROACHED IT WITH SOME APPREHENSION. BUT WHEN HE'D FOLLOWED JOYCE INTO HER APARTMENT THAT NIGHT, HE'D BEEN FORTIFIED WITH A HUNGRY GROWING DESIRE..



AND SO, WHAT HAD BEGUN MERELY AS A TRIFLING FLIRTATION HAD BLOSSOMED INTO A LUSTFUL PASSION. HE'D TAKEN JOYCE IN HIS ARMS, AND HE'D THRILLED AT HER WILLINGNESS AND THE WARMTH OF HER SOFT LIPS...

AND THEN, SUDDENLY, HIS ARMS HAD BEEN EMPTY AND HE'D STOOD STUNG, BEWILDERED, BECAUSE JOYCE HAD CRIED . . .

RAYMOND REMEMBERED HOW GOOD HE'D FELT ABOUT JOYCE AT THAT MOMENT. JOYCE WAS FINE AND PURE. THEN HE'D HELD HER AGAIN, GENTLY... AND HE'D KISSED HER AGAIN... TENDERLY...

RAYMOND REMEMBERED, TOO, THAT HE'D BEEN SURPRISED... NOT AT WHAT HE'D TOLD HER... BUT BECAUSE HE'D *MEANT* IT. HE *WAS* IN LOVE WITH JOYCE! SO SHE'D BECOME HIS, AND LATER, WHEN HE'D STEPPED FROM THE CAB IN FRONT OF HIS APARTMENT HOUSE, HIS HEART HAD BEEN SINGING AND HE'D FELT STRANGELY PROUD THAT THERE'D NEVER BEEN ANY OTHER MAN FOR JOYCE...

ONLY WHEN HE'D PUT HIS KEY INTO THE DOOR-LOCK, HAD HE THOUGHT ABOUT SYBIL, AND WHAT HE COULD SAY TO HER..

BUT SYBIL'D BEEN IN BED AND HER BACK HAD BEEN TURNED TO HIM AND IT'D BEEN SO EASY. RAYMOND RECALLED HOW GLIBLY HIS ALIBI HAD FLOWED OUT...

SORRY ABOUT BEING SO *LATE*, DEAR, BUT SOME OF THE BOYS GOT INVOLVED IN A *BULL SESSION* AND WE ALL STOPPED OFF FOR A *DRINK*...

WELL, GET TO BED *NOW*, RAYMOND. IT'S A *WONDER* YOU MEN WOULDN'T *WORRY* ABOUT HAVING TO *GET UP* EARLY IN THE MORNING...

AND SOON, "CONFERENCES AT THE BANK" HAD BECOME MORE FREQUENT... ONCE... TWICE... AS MUCH AS THREE TIMES A WEEK...

I *IDOLIZE* YOU, JOYCE! I *ADORE* YOU! I *WORSHIP* YOU!

WHEN YOU'RE NOT *WITH* ME, DARLING, I *CLOSE MY EYES* AND *PRETEND* YOU ARE... AND IT MAKES ME *HAPPY!*

BUT NOW, THE SECRET WAS OUT. SYBIL KNEW... AND RAYMOND WAS RELIEVED. HE INTERRUPTED HER RAVING...

SYBIL, I WANT A *DIVORCE!*

YOU *WANT...!* OH, THIS IS *TOO MUCH!* IF YOU *THINK*, AFTER ALL THESE *YEARS*, I'M GOING TO *LET YOU GO*...

FOR *GOD'S SAKE*, SYBIL! GIVE ME A *BREAK!* IF YOU *LOVE* ME, THEN TRY TO UNDERSTAND HOW I FEEL ABOUT *JOYCE!*

LOVE!? I DON'T LOVE *YOU*, RAYMOND. BUT I *WON'T* BE *ABANDONED!* I *WON'T* BE MADE A *FOOL* OF IN FRONT OF MY *FRIENDS!* I *WON'T* HAND YOU OVER TO THAT BLONDE WITCH ON A *SILVER PLATTER!*

HOW PROPER HE AND JOYCE HAD BEEN AT THE BANK. HOW DISCREET... HE'D THOUGHT...

EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE IN *ORDER*, MISS ADAMS.

THANK YOU, MR. OLIVER. IF THERE'S *NOTHING ELSE*, I'LL BE GOING *HOME* NOW...

YES, RAYMOND HAD LOVED JOYCE MORE THAN LIFE. YET HE HADN'T THE COURAGE TO FACE SYBIL WITH THE TRUTH. NOT YET. AND THEN, THAT VERY EVENING, AT HER APARTMENT, JOYCE HAD GIVEN HIM HIS BIRTHDAY GIFT... THE DESK SET...

...AND *SEE, HERE*, ON THE *LETTER OPENER*... IT SAYS "*GENUINE LEATHER*"! I HOPE YOU *LIKE* IT, DEAR.

WHEN IT'S GIVEN WITH *GENUINE LOVE*... WHAT *MORE* COULD A MAN ASK FOR, JOYCE?

RAYMOND WAS BREATHING HARD NOW, SMOTHERED WITH HATE AND DESPERATION. HE GRIPPED HIS NEW BIRTHDAY PRESENT, FLUSHING ANGRILY...

THAT'S *FINAL* THEN! YOU *WON'T* GIVE ME MY *FREEDOM?*

NEVER! NOT UNDER *ANY* CIRCUMSTANCES!

IT WAS DONE IN THE HEAT OF VIOLENT PASSION. IT WAS DONE ON SHEER IMPULSE. RAYMOND OLIVER WHIRLED ON HIS WIFE, PLUNGING THE LETTER-OPENER DEEP INTO HER CHEST. SYBIL RASPED OUT A HOARSE CROW-LIKE CAW...SWAYING...HER FACE DISTORTED IN AGONY...

THEN DIE, BLAST YOU... DIE!

AGGGGHHKK...

SO SYBIL DIED AND RAYMOND OLIVER WAS A MURDERER. HE SHRANK BACK, SHAKING UNCONTROLLABLY, UNABLE TO GRASP THAT THE GORY SCENE BEFORE HIM MEANT THAT HE WAS FREE AT LAST. INSTEAD, HE FELL TO HIS KNEES...

SYBIL...CHOKE... I... I DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT! SYBIL!

RAYMOND LOOKED DOWN AT THE BLOODY BEGINNING OF HIS NEW-FOUND FREEDOM AND KNEW HOW FLEETING THAT FREEDOM WOULD BE. HE FLED THEN TO HIS BELOVED JOYCE, AND SOUGHT REFUGE AND COMFORT IN HER ARMS...

TELL ME WHAT *HAPPENED*, DARLING! IT WON'T *MATTER*, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO *TELL* ME!

I CAN'T! DON'T *ASK* ME ANY MORE! I... I JUST WANT TO *HOLD* YOU...

IT'S *ALL RIGHT*, RAY! *IT'S ALL RIGHT!*

I *LOVE* YOU, JOYCE! *REMEMBER* THAT... NO MATTER *WHAT* HAPPENS! IF YOU DON'T *SEE* ME OR *HEAR* FROM ME FOR A LONG TIME... REMEMBER I *LOVE* YOU AND *WAIT FOR ME!*

THE NEXT MORNING AT THE BANK, JOYCE DID SEE RAYMOND AGAIN... AT HIS DESK. HE DIDN'T LOOK AT HER ONCE...

A FEW MINUTES BEFORE NOON, RAYMOND CASUALLY ENTERED THE VAULT. HE COUNTED OUT FIFTEEN THOUSAND DOLLARS IN SMALL BILLS, LOOKED FURTIVELY ABOUT, THEN STUFFED THEM INTO HIS POCKETS...

AS HE PASSED JOYCE'S CAGE, HE HESITATED, LOOKED AT HER, SAID NOTHING, THEN TURNED AND WALKED FROM THE BANK AND WAS GONE...

HE HAILED A CAB AND TOOK IT TO THE AIRPORT...

A ONE-WAY FARE TO *ACAPULCO*, PLEASE...

THERE'S A FLIGHT LEAVING IN *FIFTEEN MINUTES*, SIR!

THERE WAS TIME BEFORE THE MONEY HE'D TAKEN WOULD BE MISSED, AND IT WOULD BE DAYS BEFORE THEY'D UNLOCK HIS APARTMENT AND FIND HIS WIFE'S BODY. BY THEN, RAYMOND WOULD HAVE LOST HIMSELF. IN MEXICO, HE CHARTERED A PLANE TO PANAMA...

RAYMOND OLIVER TRAVELED FAR... HE TRAVELED FAST. HE RODE A CROOKED TRAIL TO COLUMBIA, SOUTH AMERICA...TO THE ARGENTINE... THEN FINALLY TO BRAZIL. THERE HE FOUND A TINY TOWN... A DIRTY, HOT, FORGOTTEN TOWN...

THIS'LL DO! HOW MUCH?

FOUR DOLLARS... AMERICAN MONEY, SEÑOR!

WHAT DOES A FUGITIVE...A THIEF AND A MURDERER... DO IN A LITTLE FORSAKEN TOWN? RAYMOND KEPT TO HIS HOVEL ... BY HIMSELF... DRINKING...THINKING...

IF I COULD *ONLY CONTACT JOYCE!* BUT I *CAN'T!* SYBIL *KNEW* ABOUT HER. SHE HAD US *FOLLOWED*. SO *OTHERS* KNEW. THE *POLICE* MUST KNOW. THEY'D BE WATCHING HER *MAIL* FOR *MY LETTER*...

EACH DAY WAS A YEAR... EACH YEAR, A CENTURY... EACH MONTH, AN ETERNITY. BUT SLOWLY, SLOWLY THEY PASSED. RAYMOND FELL INTO THE WAYS OF THE LOCAL PEASANTS. HE DROWSED AND DRANK AND AVOIDED ALL CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD. HIS CLOTHES STANK OF SWEAT AND ROTTED ON HIS BODY. HIS HAIR GREW LONG AND HE SELDOM SHAVED OR BATHED...

YOU SHOULD SEE ME *NOW*, JOYCE, BABY! YOU'D *SPIT* ON ME. BUT I *LOVE* YOU, HONEY. I *MISS* YOU...

IT WAS ONLY THE SWEET MEMORY OF JOYCE AND KNOWING SHE'D BE WAITING FOR HIM THAT SUSTAINED RAYMOND THROUGH THAT LOST SICKENING, BLISTERING YEAR. BUT IT'D BECOME MORE THAN HE COULD BEAR NOW. HE LONGED TO SEE HER...TO HOLD HER ONCE MORE IN HIS LONG-EMPTY ARMS...

JOYCE...SOB ...*JOYCE!*

FINALLY, HE COULD STAND IT NO LONGER...

NO MORE OF THIS *SWILL!* I'M *LEAVIN'* THIS ROACH-HOLE, I'M GOING *BACK* TO HER! I *NEED* HER! *I CAN'T LIVE ANOTHER MINUTE WITHOUT HER!*

WITH THE MONEY REMAINING, HE BOUGHT NEW CLOTHES, AND IN A WEEK, HE REACHED RIO DE JANEIRO. THERE, HE BOARDED A PLANE FOR MEXICO. RAYMOND OLIVER WAS COMING HOME...

JUST LET ME *SEE* HER AGAIN... *HOLD* HER... JUST *ONCE MORE*... *THEN* LET THEM *TAKE* ME!

WHEN THE PLANE LANDED, HE RUSHED THROUGH THE GATES PAST CUSTOMS...

HEY, YOU!

A TAXI SPED HIM INTO THE CITY...

LOSE THAT CAR BEHIND US AND THERE'S A *'C'-NOTE* IN IT FOR YOU, CABBY! YOU CAN *SAY* I HAD A *GUN.*

I *SEE* IT! IT'S POINTED *RIGHT AT MY HEAD!*

THE CAB WEAVED AND TWISTED THROUGH THE CITY AND RAYMOND ALIT NEAR JOYCE'S APARTMENT BUILDING, THE CUSTOM'S CAR LOST IN MIDTOWN TRAFFIC...

HERE Y'ARE, CABBY! JUST TELL THEM I GOT OUT ON THE *WEST SIDE!*

RIGHT! AND *THANKS!* IT WAS *FUN!*

HE TOOK THE STEPS TWO AT A TIME, HAMMERED INSANELY UPON HER DOOR...

YES?

JOYCE! JOYCE ADAMS! DOESN'T SHE *LIVE* HERE ANY MORE? SHE *PROMISED* ME SHE'D *WAIT* FOR ME!

THE OLD WOMAN IN JOYCE'S APARTMENT SHOOK HER HEAD AND STARED IN DISBELIEF AT RAYMOND...

DON'T YOU READ THE *PAPERS*, MISTER? *JOYCE ADAMS WAS ELECTROCUTED FOR THE MURDER OF SYBIL OLIVER OVER SIX MONTHS AGO.* SHE'LL *WAIT FOREVER*, ALL RIGHT!

ELECTROCUTED! OH, LORD! NO! NO!

THE POLICE TOLD RAYMOND ALL ABOUT IT WHEN HE CAME IN, TEARFULLY, TO GIVE HIMSELF UP...

WE FOUND HER *FINGERPRINTS* ALL OVER THAT *LETTER-OPENER* YOUR WIFE WAS STABBED WITH, OLIVER. IT WAS AN *OPEN* AND *SHUT CASE!* WE FIGURED *YOU'D* TAKEN OFF WITH THAT *DOUGH* TO *DIVERT SUSPICION!*

JOYCE... SOB... *JOYCE...*

THE END